

TESTIMONY OF
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FOR THE
NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS, TRANSIT AND PIPELINES
OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
ON
TRANSIT SAFETY: THE FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION'S
STATE SAFETY OVERSIGHT PROGRAM

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The RTA is the financial oversight and regional planning body for the three public transit operations in northeastern Illinois: The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra commuter rail and Pace suburban bus and paratransit provider. For more information, visit www.rtachicago.org and www.movingbeyondcongestion.org.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am, Duana Love of the Regional Transportation Authority of Northeastern Illinois, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to provide testimony.

Overview

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) was established in 1974 to ensure financially sound, comprehensive, and coordinated public transportation for northeastern Illinois. The RTA accomplishes this by providing financial oversight and regional planning for the area's three public transit operators: the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra commuter rail, and Pace suburban bus. Together, this rapid transit, commuter rail, and city and suburban bus network constitutes the second largest transit system in the United States with nearly 600 million rides per year.

The RTA region spans approximately 3,700 square miles including nearly 900 miles of railroad track. The six county region includes the City of Chicago, 272 municipalities and the counties of Cook, DuPage, Lake, McHenry, Kane and Will. The extensive RTA bus and rail network shares multimodal operations along more than 24 thousand miles of interstate highways, freeways, and arterials.

The RTA's involvement in the State Safety Oversight (SSO) Program is mandated by the Federal Transit Administration (49 CFR Part 659) State Safety Oversight Rule ("the Rule) and the RTA Act. The Illinois Legislature amended the RTA Act (70 ILCS 3615/2.11) to designate the RTA as the oversight agency responsible for implementing and administering the SSO Rule. The Rule requires rail safety oversight of any rail fixed guideway system that:

1. Is not regulated by the Federal Railroad Administration, and
2. Is included in FTA's calculation of fixed guideway route miles or receives funding under FTA's formula program for urbanized areas (49 U.S.C. 5336);
or
3. Has submitted documentation to FTA indicating its intent to be included in FTA's calculation of fixed guideway route miles to receive funding under FTA's formula program for urbanized areas (49 U.S.C. 5336).

Mr. Chairman, since Metra Commuter Rail is regulated by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) is the only rail transit agency in northeastern Illinois that falls under the Rule.

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) operates seven (7) Rail Lines, (Red, Purple, Yellow, Blue, Brown, Orange, and Green Lines) serving approximately 144 million passengers on 224 miles of mainline revenue track. This Heavy Rail system includes 122 miles of ballasted roadbed, 80 miles of open-deck-elevated structure, and 22 miles in subway. The CTA's 1,190 rapid transit cars operate over 319 round-trip route miles, serving a total of 144 passenger stations. There are approximately 2,136 scheduled train departures each weekday requiring 115 trains sets with 952 cars. Each weekday, the

CTA operates about 175,000 vehicle miles serving 500,000 riders.

RTA Rail Safety Oversight (RSO) Program

The RTA's Rail Safety Oversight (RSO) program was designed to enforce the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) State Safety Oversight (SSO) Rule for fixed rail guideway systems. As program guidance, the RTA employed the System Safety Program Standard and Procedures (SSPS) which established requirements to be implemented by the Chicago Transit Authority.

The RTA Standard includes minimum requirements for two key areas: first, safety practices to reduce the likelihood of unintentional events that may lead to death, injury, or property damage; and secondly, security practices to reduce intentional wrongful or criminal acts. The RTA Board of Directors adopted the Standard in November of 1997, in order to comply with the requirements of the State Safety Oversight Rule. The RTA Board encourages the CTA to exceed these minimum requirements in their passenger operations and to further enhance safety and security by applying system safety principles throughout CTA activities.

The RTA Standard further requires that the CTA define the safety program for employees and contractors that incorporate applicable local, state, and federal requirements. A description of the specific activities required to implement the program, including tasks performed by the CTA System Safety personnel and the safety related tasks to be performed by other departments and contractors is also required. Once identified, these tasks are used to develop areas of responsibility for implementing the safety program.

While documented procedures are essential to the successful implementation of any program, the state of practice has an even greater impact. The CTA System Safety group responsible for implementation of the Safety Program, reports directly to the office of the President of the CTA. This direct reporting relationship provides a direct line of communication for addressing safety issues.

RTA Rail Safety Oversight (RSO) Program Implementation

The RTA's Rail Safety Oversight (RSO) Program is managed by the Oversight & Technology Development Division of the Planning Department. The RTA's staff of trained engineers includes specialists in the areas of transportation, industrial safety, rail safety, and project management all enhanced by safety specific training received from the Transportation Safety Institute (TSI).

Mr. Chairman, the RTA is committed to its statutory oversight function. The Rail Safety Oversight program, which occasionally uses consultants to augment accident investigations and safety audits, is wholly funded through our annual operating budget.

This responsibility includes: requiring and approving the investigation of major CTA accidents; conducting on-site triennial reviews, filing requisite reports to the FTA and requiring and approving the annual internal safety audit. Safety program activities also

involve hazard management, safety certification, and corrective actions resulting from investigations and/or audits, and any other safety program activities of interest to the RTA.

Regarding accident investigations, the CTA Safety Group conducts accident investigations using procedures approved by the RTA. Since the System Safety group reports directly to the President, they are empowered to conduct investigations and make corrective action recommendations to the appropriate CTA departments based on areas of responsibility identified in the System Safety Program Plan. In the event the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) intends to investigate a CTA accident, the CTA must notify the RTA and the RTA becomes a party to the investigation.

As members of the Subcommittee may be aware, there was a derailment on the CTA rail system this past week that resulted in the evacuation of nearly 1,000 passengers from a subway in downtown Chicago. The RTA extends our regrets to all of the passengers who were injured and inconvenienced. We also commend the CTA and local emergency service agencies for handling the incident in a manner that resulted in no fatalities and timely restoration of service. Those to be acknowledged for their services are firefighters and police in the city of Chicago and surrounding suburbs, along with medical personnel and emergency response agencies such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Considering the circumstances, we can't say enough about their effective collaboration and support along with the cooperation of the train passengers.

Mr. Chairman, the FTA's State Safety Oversight program has been beneficial in establishing cooperative working relationships between the FTA, RTA and the CTA to facilitate program implementation. This level of coordination provides enhanced safety benefits to the agencies and program, but most notably to the traveling public.

The FTA program also has a secondary but equally important benefit that affords opportunities for information sharing among oversight agencies. Best practices and lessons learned are shared during annual meetings, conference calls and workshops sponsored by FTA. The RTA is participating on the FTA's Accident Investigation and Performance Measures Work Groups to address safety program issues. Similarly, industry practices for Fatigue Management are being assessed through an FTA survey issued through the oversight agencies.

SSO Program Opportunities and Challenges

Mr. Chairman, the FTA's SSO Program has provided an effective framework for the oversight of rail safety. In the northeastern Illinois region, the program facilitates enhanced interagency coordination among transportation providers, state and city departments of transportation, and emergency services. Since the CTA operates in a large geographic area, coordination is required for more than 30 communities.

Examples of such coordination include specialized training with city and suburban Police and Fire Districts to ensure personnel safety when accessing the rail system. Such a drill

was conducted on Sunday June 11, 2006 with the CTA. The Mass Casualty Incident Training exercise provided an opportunity for the CTA to work with the Emergency Medical Services, Fire Suppression and the Rescue Divisions of the Chicago Fire Department. During the drill, each agency identified areas of improvement to ensure understanding and testing of their standard operating procedures and communications protocols. The CTA is currently compiling a report that will include lessons learned from the drill for submittal to the Department of Homeland Security.

The American Red Cross of Greater Chicago provides another example of interagency cooperation. During major events, the Red Cross provides expanded disaster services by managing information on injured and hospitalized passengers for their families. With Red Cross serving such a vital role to the community, rail system operators are available to focus on recovery of services. Other northeastern Illinois coordination entities include the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) local Surface Transportation Rail Inspector, the Illinois Terrorism Task Force which hosts an annual Transportation Emergency Preparedness Exercise and the Gary-Chicago-Milwaukee Intelligent Transportation System Priority Corridor Coalition which coordinates information sharing and incident management for the 16-county tri-state area.

While such coordination opportunities are abundant, participation is often limited by available resources. Given the recent amendment to the SSO Rule to include system security, a continued and expanded commitment of resources is required by oversight agencies to ensure compliance. Expanded resource commitments include additional safety and security training as well as oversight staff to effectively interface with transportation security professionals.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, again thank you and the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify. We at the RTA look forward to working with the FTA and the partner agencies to ensure the safety and security of the public transportation system. I appreciate the Subcommittee's interest in this area and your commitment to effective and meaningful transit safety programs. I would be pleased to respond to questions at this time.